

COMMUNITY NEWS

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Residents, county at odds over Montrose

■ Project to widen parkway into four-lane highway puzzling to some, promising to officials

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Ten months after the start of construction on Montrose Parkway West, neighbors still question the project's purpose while county officials promise long-term traffic benefits.

The \$68 million project will be a four-lane divided highway stretching 1.8 miles from Montrose Road, east of Tildenwood Lane, to "old" Old Georgetown Road in North Bethesda.

Emily Mintz, a resident of the Old Farm neighborhood, said the plan is "literally insane" because the parkway will "dead end at a traffic light."

At its eastern endpoint, the four-lane parkway will end one block from Rockville Pike at "old" Old Georgetown Road, a two-lane street.

"We're sort of scratching our heads and wondering where these cars are going to go over," Mintz said.

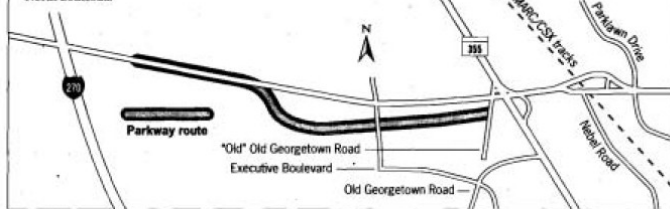
Parkway drivers seeking to cross Rockville Pike will have to travel on the two-lane "old" Old Georgetown Road and continue on Montrose Road.

But this will not be permanent, according to Edgar Gonzalez, deputy director of transportation policy for the Department of Public Works and Transportation.

The county is currently negoti-

MONTROSE PARKWAY

The county has started construction on Montrose Parkway, which will extend from Montrose Road east of Tildenwood Lane to "old" Old Georgetown Road. It is designed to alleviate traffic between Interstate 270 and Rockville Pike in North Bethesda.



SOURCE: STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

GAZETTE FILE GRAPHIC

ating with the Maryland State Highway Administration to create a tunnel that will extend the parkway below Route 355 (Rockville Pike).

When that interchange is complete, the parkway will continue past Rockville Pike, and the existing traffic light at the intersection of Montrose Road and Rockville Pike will be eliminated.

Depending on the outcome of the negotiations, construction on that interchange could start this year, Gonzalez said.

But life along a road that is undergoing a major widening project is far from pleasant, neighbors say.

Old Farm resident Jo Brecher said work on the traffic-mitigating project has increased traffic on Montrose Road — so much that she avoids driving it.

"I've even had people drive through the neighborhood and ask me how to get more quickly to Rockville Pike because Montrose Road is so backed up," she said.

Traffic jams resulting from the construction are unpredictable, Mintz said.

"You can't predict if they're going to close a lane," she said. "If they close a lane, it's a nightmare."

Next summer, Montrose Road is scheduled to close completely for six months, as work begins to widen the road and build an underpass for a creek and wildlife to pass through, said Tom Pogue, spokesman for the Department of Public Works and Transportation.

During that time, traffic will detour to the newly-constructed parkway, which is scheduled to open when Montrose Road closes.

The entire project will reach completion one year later, Pogue said.

Although construction has progressed, many residents remain opposed to the project even as it continues, Mintz said.

"Everyone understands traffic has to be [remedied] and it needs to be reduced, but there is a widespread understanding that this is a waste of financial and environmental resources for no reason," she said. "That's what is so offensive."

In addition to the possibility of having a tunnel under Route 355, the state has another project that will create a bridge over the railroad tracks at Nebel Street just east of Rockville Pike, Gonzalez said.

The tunnel and bridge will link Montrose Parkway West with Montrose Parkway East, which will

extend from Parklawn Drive in Rockville to Veirs Mill Road in Wheaton.

The Montrose Parkway East project is currently undergoing a design phase, Gonzalez said, and will not go before the County Council for approval until the design and cost estimates are determined.

Put together, the four projects will "further modify the traffic patterns in the area and make things better for everyone," Gonzalez said.

But Mintz, who was part of a group of residents that filed — and lost — a lawsuit opposing the Montrose Parkway West project, said that a better solution would focus on public transportation.

"What city do you throw a highway in and say that is going to solve transportation issues?" she said. "It has to be based on transit."

When the project is complete, residents will benefit from less congestion, Gonzalez said, as the new parkway diverts a portion of the traffic that currently floods Montrose Road, particularly at the East Jefferson Street intersection.

Widened sidewalks and a new bike path will also enhance safety along Montrose Road, Gonzalez said.

"I have seen little kids...on bicycles riding on that sidewalk immediately adjacent to traffic traveling 50 miles per hour," he said. "That's not very safe."

Pedestrian safety will not entirely improve, however, according to Brecher.

"People are not going to be able to cross that road safely," she said. "It's going to be such a large road."